

VZCZCXRO6476
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHAM #1248/01 1150657
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 240657Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2362
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 001248

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA FRONT OFFICE
NSC FOR ABRAMS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2028

TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: QUARTET ENVOYS DISCUSS GAZA, HAMAS, AND UPCOMING
PRINCIPALS MEETING

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The Quartet Envoys met in Amman on April 17 in preparation for the May 2 Principals meeting in London. The Gaza situation dominated, with all sides agreeing that the volatility there impedes peace prospects. The UN's Robert Serry presented a plan Serry said was proposed by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for deploying PA forces in southeastern Gaza with the help of an international task force, with the goal of securing the Gaza-Israel crossings, and thereby allowing them to open. The U.S. and EU both expressed reservations. A/S David Welch urged finding ways to more effectively apportion blame onto Hamas for Palestinian hardships. Russia updated the envoys on its still-nascent plans to convene an international meeting in Moscow this summer, and claimed the various parties are more open to the idea. The envoys discussed the proposed text for a May 2 Quartet Statement and agreed to better highlight progress so far. End Summary.

12. (C) Participants:

U.S.: NEA A/S David Welch, Ambassador David Hale, Mustafa Popal (NEA Staff Assistant), Hanan Cohen, Ali Lejlic (Embassy Notetakers)

EU: Ambassador Marc Otte, Advisor Rosemary Davis

UN: UN Envoy Robert Serry, Robert Dann (Jerusalem)

Russian Federation: Ambassador Sergey Yakovlev and Russian Embassy NEA Watcher Nikolay Makarov

13. (C) A/S David Welch reviewed the USG diplomatic calendar, including the President's visit to Israel and then Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and the Secretary's plan to visit Israel and the Palestinians after the Quartet Principals meeting in London. He cited three priorities: political talks, tangible progress on the ground in the Palestinian areas, and broadening international support. He highlighted the success of General Dayton's mission, noting that Israel, the Palestinians, and the U.S. were pleased with the training of Palestinians.

EU: Gaza Events Can Have An Unraveling Effect

14. (C) The EU's Marc Otte said his impression at a recent meeting at Israel's Ministry of Defense was that Israel is "preparing for war and contingencies," adding that Gaza events divert energies away from the peace process. He noted that the Egyptians are concerned that Hamas is now criticizing them almost as often as Israel, and can foresee a moment where Hamas will turn its rockets toward Egypt. The

UN's Robert Serry said the Egyptians are "getting desperate" given Egypt's failure to foster a ceasefire. Meanwhile, the PA is concerned its standing with the Palestinian street is being undermined.

Skepticism on Proposal on Gaza Entry Points

15. (S) Postulating that Hamas hits the crossing points into Israel mainly because they are closed - a point both Welch and Otte contested, saying they were hit even when they were open - Serry urged finding a "reasonable way" to open Gaza, Hamas's main condition to stop Qassams. He raised, though did not explicitly endorse, an idea that he discussed with Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad. An international task force would help PA forces (Presidential Guard, civil police, Customs) redeploy to a 40 square-kilometer "access pocket" in southeast Gaza. This deployment should not be seen as a PA bridgehead from which to confront Hamas, which would have to acquiesce first. The international force might be a few hundred armed military and police elements, based in the Sinai, maybe to include a "robust" extraction force. Serry said EU and Arab/Muslim troops could make up the international force. Turkey has good relations with Hamas, he noted. According to Serry, Fayyad seems to have discussed the proposal with PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and Serry hoped the PA would take the lead in any further sharing of these ideas, to ensure it is viewed as a Palestinian proposal.

16. (S) Welch and Otte raised a variety of concerns. Otte doubted Hamas would be interested, and questioned whether Abbas or Egypt would be. He added that the EU position against talking to Hamas would not change. Welch noted that the town of Rafah, north of the proposed "access pocket," was

AMMAN 00001248 002 OF 003

the chief smuggling point, and must be dealt with first. If Israel judges invading Rafah will stop smuggling, they would need to go in via the area of proposed PA deployment, and thus would oppose the "pocket" plan.

17. (S) Welch assessed that Hamas may be trying to show only Hamas can control the area and ultimately the political process. However, Hamas is vulnerable; Palestinians rally to Hamas when Israel attacks, but Israel's "collective punishment" distances Palestinians from Hamas. The goal should be to blame Hamas for their suffering. Israel will not hold back forever, Welch said, adding that threats of military action can be useful deterrent. Otte questioned whether Abbas is pleased or displeased with Israeli pressure on Hamas. Welch offered that if Israel were to stick to targeting Hamas leaders, the PA might protest only mutely. Israel's approach seems partly to announce punitive measures (i.e., cutting electricity or fuel), but not necessarily carry them out. Serry noted that whether the situation is worse or not, poor conditions have a cumulative affect on the people.

Follow-Up on Israeli and Palestinian Commitments

18. (S) Welch said General Fraser's mission is to verify what the sides have committed to do, and they know this. One checkpoint that was removed was deemed to be significant, while 25 percent of the dirt mounds were. "We are not going to focus on the other 75 percent," he added, but rather will encourage continued progress to ensure positive momentum. Israel indicates there will be more steps, and the USG will verify that on the ground. Serry proposed focusing on impact, not numbers, referring to significant road blocks that have a real impact on movement of people and goods. He said that that Quartet Special Envoy Blair's approach was helpful, connecting economic activity with obstacle removals.

19. (C) Otte summarized the EU's capacity building within the PA, saying the EU will increase and accelerate its work on

Rule of Law and police issues. If police work improved, it would require a court and penal system ready to deal with the consequences. Fifty million euros are needed just for upgrading the prison system, and more to improve the broader justice system, he said.

Proposed Annapolis Follow-up in Moscow

¶10. (C) Russia's Sergey Yakovlev said his country senses a more positive attitude in the Middle East, including among Israelis, toward holding a meeting in Moscow this summer. Foreign Minister Lavrov intends to share ideas at the Principals Meeting and Russia welcomes Quartet input. For the moment, the meeting is seen as a one and a half-day event placing three sets of issues on the agenda: 1) the Israeli-Palestinian situation, 2) the comprehensive Middle East Peace Process, ways to create common understanding between Israel and Syria, and how one might give momentum to that process, and 3) regional cooperation. The meeting would be more compact than Annapolis.

Way Forward for Quartet

¶11. (S) Welch proposed a uniform private message and agenda for the Quartet: 1) Apportion responsibility for the violence squarely onto Hamas. Israel, he noted, has said it will not take military action unless others initiate violence. 2) Clarify that the Quartet has major humanitarian concerns regarding the Gaza situation, wants the violence to stop, and wants to be assured that weapons are not introduced. 3) Work to marshal private and public pressure. 4) Make clear that we are looking at ideas for the future.

¶12. (S) Welch said the recent visit to the region of APNSA Hadley was part of a broader strategy to impress on all sides that we are watching events carefully and want progress. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat had noted that the "structure and communication are very good" on the negotiations track: the existence of working groups, the discussion of all issues including maps, the holding of high-level meetings (a dozen times a week in some cases). But the pace and content are not robust or satisfactory. This, Welch, said, is likely to be true for some time; Israeli-Palestinian talks tend to bear fruit only when they near completion, and there's a lot of blaming in the interim. There is little chance of any agreement by mid-May, and we

AMMAN 00001248 003 OF 003

must manage expectations.

Not Letting the Arabs off the Hook

¶13. (C) Welch said the Quartet should not let the Arabs off the hook on their responsibility to help improve things on the ground. The U.S. and the EU have donated hundreds of millions of dollars as promised in Paris, but little has come from the Arabs. Otte proposed chastising the Arabs for citing the lack of improvement in the lives of Palestinians while making only paltry contributions themselves. Public and private efforts are needed, he said, to "shame" the Arabs by contrasting their contributions with those of the West, and to remind them that the goal is to help the Palestinians.

Preparing for the London Principals Meeting

¶14. (C) Otte suggested that the Quartet Statement be better designed to counter skepticism that the peace process is going nowhere, and Welch promised to "crystallize" and tighten the statement, making it more upbeat, noting challenges while underscoring progress. The agenda will also be tightened, with a greater and earlier emphasis on Annapolis progress and Gaza. Otte said Secretary Rice's

presenting the state of play in London will beg the question of what comes next. It would be useful to hear even if in general terms, whether the U.S. will help bridge the gaps, he said.

¶15. (C) Welch noted that with the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting also in London during the Principals Meeting, the British have suggested that select Arab representatives at the AHLC could meet with the Quartet. Should that happen, it will be clearly distinct from the Quartet Meeting. First the Quartet, then the press event, and if there's any Arab involvement it will only be afterward. The objective utility of the possible meeting with the Arab states remained unclear.

¶16. (U) A/S Welch did not have the chance to clear on this cable.
HALE